

EARTH TODAY

New leadership at EFJ as entity begins new chapter

Petre Williams-Raynor
Contributing Editor

ACCOUNTANT BARRINGTON Lewis and environmental professional Allison Rangolan McFarlane have assumed leadership of the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica (EFJ) as chief executive officer and chief technical director, respectively.

The appointments cement the turning of a new leaf on the operations of the EFJ, which has been merged with the Jamaica Protected Areas Trust/Forest Conservation Fund (JPAT/FCF).

The appointment of the duo follows a number of new board member appointments for the entity last year. The board is led by Professor Dale Webber – Pro Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies at the University of the West Indies (UWI), who has a stellar

reputation in the field of coastal ecology and environmental management.

“It is a wonderful opportunity,” Lewis told **The Gleaner**. “It is something that when I started I didn’t necessarily envision myself doing.”

“But having been in the office, working in the environmental field for the last nine years, it has been a rewarding experience. It has given me a new focus. I am very happy and looking forward to the challenge,” he added.

The holder of a bachelor’s degree in accounting and economics and a master’s in accounting, Lewis — a certified chartered and public accountant — joined the EFJ

team as finance manager, following on his service as manager of the Office of the Guild of Students at the UWI.

McFarlane is herself eager for what the next chapter of the EFJ will bring.

ALWAYS BEEN INVOLVED

“Historically, we have always been involved in grant-making and have already started to role that out again — both with the pool of funds we have in hand and working with the Ministry (of Economic Growth and Job Creation) in terms of the Special Climate Change Adaptation Fund,” remarked the former executive director of the JPAT/FCF, where she started in 2009.

The EFJ recently put out two calls for proposals from among civil society and has, since inception, approved close to 1,200 projects valued at more than J\$2,162.72 million.

“We will continue to work to ensure that there are additional funds available for our grantees and members to continue to develop and implement their programmes. We plan to make it bigger and better,” said McFarlane, the holder of a bachelor’s degree in zoology and a master’s in coastal zone management and marine biology.

The EFJ has its genesis in two debt swaps between the governments of Jamaica and the United States, valued at just over US\$21 million, and with a focus on conservation and child development locally.

“The last of the two ended in 2012. Thereafter, there was no funding source and it was thought that the EFJ would operate as a sinking fund and it would have been wound up after the last pool of funds in 2012,” explained Lewis.

“However, the board took a decision that based on the good work we have been doing, we should look at extending the life of the organisation, and so several options were pursued,” he added.

One of those options was the amalgamation of the EFJ with JPAT/FCF, which itself was born of a debt swap — this one involving not only the governments of Jamaica and the US, but also The Nature Conservancy.

“The debt swap for the FCF was being administered by the JPAT. That will run until 2024 and so there is a guaranteed pool of funding that will come in for at least the next seven years,” Lewis said.

“But being proactive now, we are going after other sources of funds. When the 2024 pool of funds would have come to end, the organisation will need to



PHOTO BY TERRY-ANN MILLER

Allison Rangolan McFarlane

have something in place to take over,” he added.

In addition to fundraising and a new set of programmatic activities, the EFJ is also looking to ramp up its public relations, with social-media

activist and independent blogger Emma Lewis — herself a member of the new board — heading up their new public relations committee.

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Barrington Lewis

Japan tsunami unites a community

Amitabh Sharma
Contributor

HIGASHIMATSUSHIMA, Japan: THE MARCH 11, 2011 tsunami in Japan left in its wake a trail of death and destruction, but it also united a community.

“The wall of water was 10.5 metres high and it surged, leaving the city inundated,” recalled Shuya Takahashi, director of revival policy at the Revival Planning Division of the Higashimatsushima city office.

“It was eight community-based organisations that came together. We did not wait for any external help. Self-help was the best approach and we immediately sprang into action,” noted Takahashi, who, like many others in this coastal city, went on the road, wading through debris, silt, receding water, and collapsed structures to help fellow citizens.

With 65 per cent of the urban area submerged, it was not an easy task. People had to forget their personal challenges and trauma to be at ground zero.

Takahashi’s daughter died in this disaster.

“She was a university student,” he said.

“She was trying to help an elderly person when she got swept away by the tsunami waters,” Takahashi added, the sadness over his loss evident in his eyes.

COMPLEX SITUATION

It was a complex situation, according to the city official, as nothing of this scale had happened in anyone’s living memory.

Efforts to rehabilitate and rebuild later took priority as community members collaborated to share ideas on the best way forward.

“We held a series of consultations with various groups, senior citizens, city officials and even schoolchildren to give their recommendations on the reconstruction processes,” he said.

Efficiency of the processes was backed by the local and the central governments, which passed a



Mitumasa Otsuka, manager of the Higashimatsushima stockpile warehouse.



Only the bell and some statues from this Buddhist temple in Higashimatsushima survived the surge of the tsunami, which killed thousands of the city’s population.

legislation to add 2.5 per cent tax to aid in the reconstruction and rehabilitation. The legislation took one year to pass.

Since then, a stockpile warehouse

has been built, accommodating from canned food to solar-powered lamps, portable toilets made of cardboard, and appliances.

“These supplies can sustain 4,000 people for three days,” informed Mitumasa Otsuka, who has responsibility for the warehouse.

“The supplies are checked regularly for their usability and the perishable goods are replaced every two years. The ones nearing expiry date are distributed during public festival and events,” he noted.

Near the Higashimatsushima town coastline a canal flows, the ripples of water on the surface are calming, but on that fateful March day, the tsunami broke the banks and gushed inwards.

Like a domino effect, the wall of water destroyed homes, shops and public buildings along its path and scores were caught and swept away in the deluge.

Today, a new township of Higashimatsushima — a smart eco town — is taking shape on the hills, way above the 9-metre surge of the tsunami waters, with a hope and prayer that the future generations will be safe, should another disaster strike.

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>> Read Earth Today next week for more on the emerging ecotown of Higashimatsushima.